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THE CATHOLIC LAYMAN.

Ἐὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ αἱ ἡμέραι, αὐτοὶ ῥιζοῦσιν αἱ ἀνὸς τῶν θεῶν τοῦ ναοῦ.

LUKE ii. 14.

PUBLISHED THE MIDDLE OF EVERY MONTH, AT 9, UPPER SACKVILLE-STREET, DUBLIN.

Vol. VI.—No. 68.

AUGUST 19, 1857.

Annual Subscription, 3s. 6d.
Payable in Advance.

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THE DIET OF SPIRES.

ANY one who has ascended the river Rhine above the city of Mayence towards Strasbourg must have observed about half way between those important cities, and not very far from where the river Neckar flows into the Rhine, the towers of a vast cathedral, presenting a noble and imposing appearance from the river, though, in these days of hot haste and steam, few, perchance, may arrest their journey to visit it.

Those twin tall pointed towers point out the site of the ancient and venerable city of Spire, which, though now but the mere shadow of its former greatness, was once among the most important, as well as one of the most ancient, cities of Germany. It was the chosen residence of Charlemagne and the Emperors of Germany who followed him, especially those of the Franconian and Saxonian lines; within its walls no less than 49 diets, or councils of the empire, were successively held; and in the imperial vault beneath that vast cathedral (perhaps the most stupendous building in the Romanesque style existing) once reposed the remains of no less than eight emperors of Germany, including the celebrated Rudolph, the founder of the house of Hapsburg. Their graves were rifled and the city burned by the French in 1689, in the war of the Orleans succession, under Louis XIV., except the Dom, whose vast nave and towers defied the powers of the ravager, and still strike the beholder with awe. There are now no other visible remains of the original imperial city, save a colossal tower and gateway, called the *Alt Portal*, between the town and the Landau suburb, and a ruined wall near the Protestant church, the only remaining relic of the Retscher, or Imperial Palace, in which those diets of the empire were held which for so many centuries gave laws to Germany.

It is not, however, to the epoch of that ruthless act of devastation in 1689 that we would now invite our readers' attention: our present object relates to a still earlier period, when the imperial palace and the ancient city were in their full glory, and the great emperor Charles V. filled the throne of Spain as well as that of Germany.

It was early in the month of March, in the year 1529, that a vast concourse of princes and deputies from the imperial cities assembled at Spire, and if a curious spectator at that period had placed himself beside the *Alt Portal* already mentioned, he might have distinguished, among the throngs who successively passed beneath that colossal gateway, Ferdinand, King of Bohemia, the Emperor's brother, who, during his absence at Barcelona, had been named the president of the approaching diet, the Dukes of Bavaria, and the Ecclesiastical Electors of Mentz and Treves, who each entered the city surrounded by a numerous armed escort. He might also have distinguished amid the cavalcades those of the Margrave of Brandenburg, the Prince of Anhalt, and the Landgrave of Hesse, who also entered the city amid the sound of trumpets and accompanied by a large company of horsemen; and he would have also seen arriving John, the Elector of Saxony, the most important of all the electoral princes, attended only by two eccle-

siastics—with one of them our readers have been already made acquainted; it was Philip Melancthon.

To explain to such of our readers as may not be familiar with the history of this eventful period the state of affairs which led to this important meeting, we must briefly trace the progress of events for a few years previously. In 1521, Martin Luther had been summoned before the diet at Worms, and, with all his adherents, placed under the imperial ban. Five years, however, had not elapsed when the Emperor, who had quarrelled with the existing Pope, relented from his severity, and decided on taking a different course. "Let us suspend the edict of Worms," he wrote to his brother Ferdinand, "and bring back Luther's partisans by mildness, and by a good council cause the triumph of evangelical truth." Accordingly, though Ferdinand hesitated, the diet held at Spire in 1526 decreed that things should be left in their present state, virtually allowing each state to act as they thought fit, at least until the Emperor should be able to treat personally with the Pontiff respecting the holding of a general council, which they prayed should be convoked within a year, and "that until then each state should conduct itself in such a manner as to be able to render an account to God and to the Emperor." This diet of 1526 forms an important epoch in the history of religious liberty: that which follows, however, is of still graver moment.

On the 29th June, 1528, a peace between the heads of the empire and the Church had been concluded at Barcelona, based upon the destruction of heresy, and the whole power of the empire was now about to be put in force to destroy the Reformation, which Charles V. had previously so inconsistently alternately persecuted and tolerated. The diet was convoked in November to meet at Spire, on the 21st Feb., 1529, and never had the sacerdotal party appeared in such numbers, or so decided in their determination to put down their opponents.

A commission was appointed to examine the imperial proposition. The most violent enemies of the Reformation were among its members. The priests called for the execution of the edict of Worms in 1521, while the evangelical members of the commission, among whom were the Elector of Saxony, and Jacques Sturm, one of the deputies of Strasbourg, demanded, on the contrary, the maintenance of the edict of Spire in 1526. The majority came to a resolution on the 24th March, that every religious innovation should continue to be interdicted in the places where the edict of Worms had been carried out; and that in those where the people deviated from it, and where they could not be made to conform to it without the danger of revolt, they should, at least, effect no new reform; they should touch upon no controverted point; they should not oppose the celebration of the mass; should permit no Roman Catholic to embrace Lutheranism; and that they should neither decline the episcopal jurisdiction nor tolerate any anabaptist or sacramentarian. Thus, the *status quo* and no proselytism were the essential points of this resolution, which, after having been delayed a few days by the festival of Easter, was subsequently passed by a majority of the diet on 7th April.

A consultation took place without delay between the princes and deputies who had embraced the reformed faith. The Elector of Saxony, the Landgrave of Hesse-Cassel, the Margrave of Brandenburg, the Prince of Anhalt, the Dukes and Chancellor of Luneburg, and the deputies of Strasbourg, Ulm, Nuremberg, Constance, and other imperial cities, reviewed the whole proceedings, and came at once to their resolve. If they had been animated by selfishness they would, perhaps, have accepted the decree. It left them, in fact, free, in appearance at least, to profess their faith. Ought they to demand more? Could they do so? Were they bound to constitute themselves the champions of liberty of conscience in all the world, and that at the risk of losing all that was dear to them, and invoking on their devoted heads all the power of the Emperor, now in cordial alliance with the Pope, Clement VII.? Never, perhaps, was there a more critical situation, or a severer trial of courage and principle. But it was the will of Heaven that a new era should take its date from this eventful conference; and these noble-minded and heroic men, though, perhaps, unconscious of the greatness of the results which were to flow from it, disregarded every feeling of fear or of self-

interest, and came victorious out of the trial. What, said they, should they legalize by anticipation the torture and the scaffold, though they might not themselves become the victims? Should they oppose the Holy Ghost in its work of converting souls to Christ? Should they forget their Master's command, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature?" If one of the other states of the empire desired some day to follow their example and be reformed, should they take away its power of doing so? Having themselves entered the kingdom of heaven, should they shut the door after them? No; rather endure everything, sacrifice everything, even their states, their crowns, and their lives. "Let us reject this decree," said the princes; "in matters of conscience the majority has no power." "It is to the decree of 1526," rejoined the deputies, "that we are indebted for the peace that the empire enjoys; its abolition would fill Germany with troubles and divisions. The diet is incompetent to do more than preserve religious liberty until a council meets."

From that eventful moment a new power arose—that of modern times; and the spirit of civil and religious freedom has ever since, however slowly, been steadily advancing. The ancient power, or rather that of the middle ages, which had so long subjected the world, was shaken to its base. Religious liberty for the first time boldly reared its front, and made itself heard in language which could not be mistaken, and can never be forgotten.

They were summoned before the diet. Twenty-one free cities accepted the proposition; fourteen rejected it. The Elector Palatine and King Ferdinand himself besought the princes to accept the decree, assuring them that the Emperor would be exceedingly pleased with them for doing so. "We will obey the Emperor," replied they calmly, "in everything that may contribute to maintain peace and the honour of God." Ferdinand broke up the diet; all endeavours to stop him were vain. "I have received an order from his imperial majesty," said he, "and I have executed it. All is over; submission is all that remains."

The evangelical princes, however, and their allies had also taken their resolve. A declaration was drawn up, and the Elector and his allies returned to the common hall of the diet, where they thus addressed the assembled states:—

"Dear Lords, Cousins, Uncles, and Friends!—Having repaired to this diet at the summons of his majesty, and for the common good of the empire and of Christendom, we have heard and learned that the decisions of the last diet, concerning our holy Christian faith, are to be repealed, and that it is proposed to substitute for them certain restrictive and onerous resolutions."

"King Ferdinand, and the other imperial commissioners, by affixing their seals to the last *Recess* of Spire, had promised, however, in the name of the Emperor, to carry out sincerely and inviolably all that it contained, and to permit nothing that was contrary to it. In like manner, also, you and we, electors, princes, prelates, lords, and deputies of the empire, bound ourselves to maintain always, and with our whole might, every article of that decree."

"We cannot, therefore, consent to its repeal. "Firstly, because we believe that his imperial majesty (as well as you and we) is called upon to maintain firmly what has been unanimously and firmly resolved."

"Secondly, because it concerns the glory of God and the salvation of our souls, and that in such matters we ought to have regard, above all, to the commandments of God, who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords; each of us rendering Him account for himself, without caring the least about majority or minority. "We form no judgment on that which concerns you, most dear lords; and we are content to pray God daily, that He will bring us all to unity of faith, in truth, charity, and holiness, through Jesus Christ, our throne of grace, and our only mediator."

"But in what concerns ourselves, adhesion to your resolution (and let every honest man be judge) would be acting against our conscience, condemning a doctrine which we maintain to be Christian, and pronouncing that it ought to be abolished in our states, if we could do so without trouble."

"This would be to deny our Lord Jesus Christ, to reject His Holy Word, and thus give Him just reason to deny us in turn before His Father, as He has threatened."

"What! we ratify this edict! We assert that when Almighty God calls a man to His knowledge, this man cannot, however, receive the knowledge of God! Oh! of what deadly backslidings should we not thus become the accomplices, not only among our own subjects, but also among yours."

"For this reason we reject the yoke that is imposed upon us. And although it is universally known that in our states the holy sacrament of the body and blood of our Lord is be

comingly administered, we cannot adhere to what the edict proposes against the sacramentarians, seeing that the imperial edict did not speak of them, that they have not been heard, and that we cannot resolve upon such important points before the next council. Moreover—"and this is the essential part of the protest—"as the new edict declared that the ministers shall preach the gospel, explaining it according to the writings accepted by the holy Christian Church; we think that, for this regulation to have any value, we should first agree on what is meant by the true and holy Church. Now, seeing that there is great diversity of opinion in this respect; that there is no sure doctrine but such as is conformable to the Word of God; that the Lord forbids the teaching of any other doctrine; that each text of the Holy Scriptures ought to be explained by other and clearer texts; and that this holy book is in all things necessary for the Christian, easy of understanding, and calculated to scatter the darkness, we are resolved, with the grace of God, to maintain the pure and exclusive preaching of His only Word, such as it is contained in the biblical books of the Old and New Testament, without adding anything thereto that may be contrary to it. This Word is the only truth: it is the sure rule of all doctrine, and of all life, and can never fail or deceive us. He who builds on this foundation shall stand against all the powers of hell, whilst all the human vanities that are set up against it shall fall before the face of God.

"For these reasons, most dear lords, uncles, consins, and friends, we earnestly entreat you to weigh carefully our grievances and our motives. If you do not yield to our request, we protest by these presents, before God, our only Creator, Preserver, Redeemer, and Saviour, and who will one day be our judge, as well as before all men and all creatures, that we, for us and our people, neither consent nor adhere in any manner whatsoever to the proposed decree, in anything that is contrary to God, to His holy Word, to our right conscience, to the salvation of souls, and to the last decree of Spire.

"At the same time, we are in expectation that his imperial majesty will behave towards us like a Christian prince who loves God above all things; and we declare ourselves ready to pay unto him, as well as unto you, gracious lords, all the affection and obedience that are our just and legitimate duty."

Such was the famous *Protest* that henceforward gave the name of *Protestant* to the renovated Church; and thus spoke out those courageous men whom Christendom will for ever denominate the first Protestants.

It will be observed by all thoughtful readers that it was not a mere protest against Popish error, nor against any particular creed; it was nothing less than unfurling to the world the standard of those two great principles under which the battle of religious freedom is yet to be fought, that the civil power has no control over the consciences of men in matters of religion, and that the Word of God is the true rule and standard by which men ought to be guided in matters of faith.

The princes had barely finished their address when they announced their intention of quitting Spire on the morrow. But there was still a solemn form to be gone through to complete the Protest. King Ferdinand had not heard the declaration of the 19th of April, and a deputation of the evangelical states went the next day to present it to him. The King at first received it, but immediately after desired to return it. A strange scene ensued: the brother of Charles V. refusing to keep the protest, and the deputies refusing to take it back. At last the latter, out of respect, received it from Ferdinand's hands; but they laid it boldly upon the table and instantly retired from the hall.

"The King and the imperial commissioners (says the historian, Daubigne, to whom we are indebted for this most interesting document) remained in presence of this formidable writing. It was there, before their eyes—a significant monument of the courage and faith of the Protestants. Irritated against this silent but mighty witness, which accused his tyranny, and left him the responsibility of all the evils that were about to burst upon the empire, the brother of Charles V. called some of his councillors, and ordered them instantly to bring the document back to the Protestants.

"All, however, was unavailing: the protest had been registered in the annals of the world, and nothing could erase it. Liberty of thought and of conscience had been secured for after ages. The whole of evangelical Germany, foreseeing these results, was moved by this courageous act, and adopted it as the expression of its will and of its faith. Men in every quarter beheld in it not a mere political event, but a Christian action. The youthful electoral prince, John Frederick, in this respect the organ of his age, cried to the Protestants of Spire, 'May the Almighty, who has given you grace to confess energetically, freely, and fearlessly, preserve you in that Christian firmness until the day of eternity.'

There was but one thing more to be done—it was to give their solemn appeal a legal form.

On Sunday, 25th April, two notaries, Leonard Stetner, of Freysingen, and Pangrace Saltzman, of Bamberg, were seated at a small table in a narrow chamber on the ground floor of a house situated in St. John's-lane, near the church of the same name, in Spire, and around them were the chancellors of the princes and of the evangelical cities, with several witnesses.

This little house belonged to an humble pastor, Peter Mutterstalt, deacon of St. John's, who offered a domicile for the important act that was preparing. The document having been drawn up, one of the notaries began reading it—"Since there is a natural communion between all men," it commenced, "and since even persons condemned to death are permitted to unite and appeal

against their condemnation, how much more are we, who are members of the same spiritual body, the Church of the Son of God, children of the same Heavenly Father, and, consequently, brothers in the Spirit, authorized to unite when our salvation and eternal condemnation are concerned." It then proceeded to review all that had passed at the diet, and after recording all the principal documents that had reference to it, it ended as follows—"We, therefore, appeal for ourselves, for our subjects, and for all who receive, or who shall hereafter receive, the Word of God, from all past, present, or future vexatious measures, to his Imperial Majesty, and to a free and universal assembly of holy Christendom." The document filled twelve sheets of parchment, the signatures and seals were affixed to the thirteenth.

The princes and states which joined in this protest were, the Elector John of Saxony, the Margrave George of Brandenburg, Ansbach and Cuhmbach, the Dukes Ernest and Francis of Luneburg, the Landgrave Philip of Hesse-Cassel, Wolfgang, prince of Anhalt; and 14 imperial cities, viz., Strasbourg, Ulm, Nuremberg, Constance, Reutlingen, Windsheim, Memmingen, Lindau, Kempten, Heilbronn, Lang, Weissenberg, Nordlingen, and St. Gall.

"The Reformation," says the same eloquent writer, Merle D'Aubigne, "had now taken a bodily form. It was Luther alone who said no at the diet of Worms; but churches and ministers, princes and people, said no at the diet of Spire."

CALVIN AND SERVETUS.

OF a certain class of controversialists it may be said that if one of them inveighs against persecution and intolerance in matters of faith or opinion, he points his moral by a reference to Geneva; or if an allusion is made in his presence to the horrors of the Inquisition, it is met with the question, "Who burned Servetus?" We have even heard the merciful dealings with its victims of the holy office contrasted with the execution of this first martyr of the Reformation, as some of our readers may remember was done not very long since by one of the professors in the so-called Catholic University of Dublin, in a prelection whose objects seemed to be to prove that heresy is hostile to science, while its true friends are the members of the true Church; and that freedom of opinion, like liberty of conscience, flourishes only in the genial atmosphere of Rome.

We are far from saying the learned professor ventured to assert that Servetus suffered death for his physiological discoveries; it rather appeared to us that such an assertion was needed for the comparison sought to be instituted between his case and that of Galileo, who was persecuted solely on account of his devotion to science, as well as to justify the introduction of his name and history upon such an occasion, and before a mixed audience.

The casting aspersions on the character of the advocates of truth has always been a favourite weapon with its opponents. It was so from the beginning of Christianity; and as the early Christians did not escape calumny (as the pages of Gibbon testify), neither did the great authors of the Reformation. Witness the numerous imputations on the moral character and sanity of Luther, and this weighty charge of persecution and cruelty which has rested for centuries upon the memory of one so noted for his opposition to the Church of Rome—"the implacable Calvin," "that most cruel and atrocious monster," as his accusers term him. We must do the Roman Catholic writers the justice to admit that, as will presently appear, they are not the original authors of this accusation, or of these vituperative expressions. On the contrary, Bayle writes—"The Catholics have acknowledged the falsity of all those infamous calumnies where with they have branded his conduct;" and, speaking of Bolsec's life of Calvin, he says—"It will suffice for an eternal conviction of his calumnies, that there are among the Catholics several grave authors who have not in the least countenanced his reports, which is a demonstrative proof that they are built upon no foundation."

It is more especially by the writers of a certain school in our own country that the strongest expressions have been used. Thus, Hallam says, "Servetus became a victim to the bigotry of the magistrates of Geneva, instigated by Calvin, who had acquired an immense ascendancy over that republic; and he (Calvin) has never recovered in the eyes of posterity the blow this gave to his moral reputation, which the Arminians as well as the Socinians were always anxious to depreciate."

Sigmond says—"The best proof that Calvin and Melancthon had deserted the mild, the charitable, the peaceful religion of truth, and that they followed not the divine precepts of their gentle Master, was and is that they persecuted, even unto death, a helpless, poor, and learned man."

Lastly, the writer of the articles, Calvin and Servetus, in the Penny Cyclopaedia, says—"His (Calvin's) conduct toward Servetus has drawn down upon him the epithet of a most cruel and atrocious monster; and no act of barbarity perpetrated by the Roman Catholics ever surpassed the

burning of Servetus, in which Calvin filled all the parts of informer, prosecutor, and judge."

Now, we freely admit, that, if this last statement were true, we should regard Calvin as inexcusable, and should consider the plea often urged that he acted but in conformity to the spirit of his time, as insufficient even for extenuation of his guilt. We are led, however, by a careful examination of the circumstances connected with the trial and condemnation of Servetus to regard Calvin as his bold and unsparing accuser certainly, and no less as the fearless and inflexible witness for the truth against its able opponent; but not as his prosecutor, and in no respect as his judge, or even possessed of the power to influence the judgment of those by whom he was tried. We would not, however, have it supposed that in what we are about to say in defence of Calvin we feel it to be at all necessary to our case that we should be able to exculpate him either wholly or in part from the charges brought against him in this matter. Our cause does not require that either he or any other Reformer should have been men of unspotted fame. We base our creed on no human authority, but on the written revelation of God's will; and in what we are about to say we are therefore influenced only by the love of truth.

We shall freely borrow from an interesting brochure by Mons. Rilliet, of Geneva, translated a few years since by the Rev. W. K. Tweedie, of Edinburgh,^a in which the Reformer's share in the proceeding seems to us to be impartially stated, as ascertained from unexceptionable sources; the original records of the trial having been for the first time carefully examined for this purpose.

Servetus was born about the year 1509, at Villanova, in Arragon. From his youth he displayed a decided taste for religious speculations, in which he appears to have indulged while studying the law in the University of Toulouse. Soon after, in 1531, he published his first theological work, entitled *De Trinitatis Erroribus*, in which he attacked the doctrine of the Trinity. In the following year he published another work of the same character. "One sees," says Rilliet, "the theories there appearing which he afterwards developed at length, and which affected the whole of Christianity. These writings spread by degrees in Germany and Italy, where they were not without partisans."

Meeting with no sympathy or encouragement from the leading Reformers, Servetus thought it desirable to change his name and his profession. Assuming the name Villeneuve, he became a student of Medicine, in Paris, where he is said^b to have made the discovery of the circulation of the blood. He appears to have left Paris about the year 1538, under a sentence of Parliament, and after living for some time near Lyons, to have settled at Vienne, in Dauphine, in the year 1540, where he practised as a physician. But the bent of his mind was still to theology, and in 1553 the result of the labour of years appeared in his great work which he entitled *Christianismi Restitutio*, and which embraces all the ideas, theoretical and practical, by which Servetus proposed to displace what he terms the monstrous errors of the Romish Church and the pretended reforms of the Protestant doctors, both being equally opposed, according to him, to the spirit of the Gospel and to primitive Christianity.

The book found its way to Geneva, and on the 26th of February, 1553, a French refugee named William de Trie, a friend of Calvin, residing there, denounced the work of Servetus to a relation who lived at Lyons; sent him the first sheet, reproaching him at the same time for the want of zeal among the Catholics in repressing such blasphemies, while they persecuted the teachers of the Protestant faith; and pointed out as the author the physician practising at Vienne, under the name of Villeneuve. The Lyonsese transmitted the information to the Inquisitor of the diocese, and Servetus was exposed to a rigorous examination. Not having proof of the authorship, the Lyonsese applied to De Trie for more ample information, who replied by sending some letters written by Servetus himself to Calvin, in which he explained his change of name. This made Servetus regard Calvin as the true accuser, an imputation which was formally repelled by the latter.

Upon the receipt of these proofs Servetus was arrested, and on the 5th and 6th of April, 1553, he underwent examination before a tribunal composed of ecclesiastics and laymen, where he gave replies utterly contrary to the truth, and was at last convicted by means of his own handwriting. By the aid of his friends he found means to escape from the prison of Vienne on the 7th of April, but the trial was proceeded with, and on the 17th of June a sentence was pronounced condemning him to the flames. On the same day, his effigy and a bale of copies of his book were burned in the market-place by the hands of the executioner. That the court of Vienne would have carried the sentence into effect had Servetus remained in their power appears from the answer returned to the application from the Council of Geneva, for a copy of the proceedings against him. "The president and

^a Its original title is, "Relation du process Criminel Intente a Geneve en 1553, contre Michel Servet, redige d'apres les documents originaux par Albert Rilliet."

^b By some it has been said that Servetus anticipated our countryman Harvey, in the discovery of the circulation; such, however, is not the case. Servetus knew that the septum of the heart is not perforated, as Galen had taught, but that the blood in the right ventricle enters the left through the pulmonary veins, after passing through the lungs. He was, however, quite ignorant of the systemic circulation, by means of which the blood distributed to all parts of the body returns to the right ventricle.—See art. Servetus, Penny Cyclopaedia.

^a Histoire de la Reformation. Tom. iv., chap. vi., p. 104.

^b Historical and Critical Dictionary; article, Calvin.

^c Introduction to the Literature of Europe, vol. i., p. 507; vol. ii., p. 107.

^d Unnoticed theories of Servetus—introduction.